

ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH EDUCATING
HOMELESS CHILDREN AND HOW THEY WILL IMPACT THE
QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN A LARGE METROPOLITAN
SCHOOL DISTRICT

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This dissertation proposed to examine the relationship between support services, poverty, stability, and the quality of education received from homeless children in a large metropolitan school district. Every night anywhere from 68,000 to over a million children go to sleep homeless in America. Of the total number of homeless people in the nation, families comprise almost one-third of this number and is the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. Additionally, this segment of homelessness is headed by women with at least two children below the age of six years.

The homeless population in America, has grown exponentially; yet there are no shelters for women and children in this county. Various faith-based, non-profit organizations have come to the aid of homeless families; however, many are over

extended due to the large number of families who are without a shelter, food, and clothing. Nevertheless, the county's refusal to acknowledge the existence of this phenomenon has prompted a surge among numerous organizations to take action until the county government respond to the outcry of the homeless.

This study reveals how the lack of support services, poverty, and stability contribute to whether or not a child receives a quality education. The literature reviews and results from interviews with ten homeless women and four representatives from the school district, local school, and a community organization provide more insight into the lives and daily struggle of children and their families who are destitute.

The major themes that emerged were lack of support services, affordable housing, childcare expenses, a need for case workers, and a need for shelters or assessment centers.

The conclusion is that there is a strong correlation between factors associated with educating homeless children and the receipt of a quality education. Children can not focus on receiving a quality education if they are hungry, unkempt, and tired.

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HOMELESS CHILDREN AND HOW THEY WILL IMPACT
THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN A METROPOLITAN
SCHOOL DISTRICT IN GEORGIA

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It is with great joy and honor that I give thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ who has given me the knowledge and strength to write this dissertation with love and care for humanity. Thank you, Jesus!

This dissertation is dedicated to my entire family, whom I hereby must name. First, I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Iris Rebecca Thomas, for her unwavering spirit of love; my grandfather, Frank Thomas, for making me laugh; my uncles and aunt, Henry Thomas, Melvin Thomas, and Alvin & Vangie Thomas, for standing in the gap of “fatherhood,” my cousins and brother-in-law, Amanda and Nathan Copeland, Juan and Angela Ross, and Craig Nelson, for supporting me during my struggles and Lettiemaschaum Hollins, for being a good friend. I especially dedicate this dissertation to my sisters, Terri Pope and Rhonda Nelson, for their love and support throughout my entire life; my aunt Betty Ross, who has always encouraged me to soar to my highest height; and my mother, Bernice T. Jackson, for whom has loved me and encouraged me to be whatever I wanted to be in life. Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Jade Rebeka Jackson, for your loving spirit and patience.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the Study	7
Background of the Problem	7
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Significance of the Study	10
Research Questions	11
Summary	12
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	13
Factors Associated with Educating Homeless Children	13
Summary	26
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	28
Definition of Variables and Terms.....	28
Theoretical Framework.....	30
Assumptions.....	31
Scope and Limitations.....	32
Summary	32

Table of Contents (continued)

	PAGE
CHAPTER	
IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	33
Introduction.....	33
Research Design.....	33
Access and Entry Process	34
Description of the Settings.....	34
Description of the Family Focus Group.....	36
Description of the Individuals Interviewed.....	36
Data Collection Procedures.....	37
Data Analysis Process.....	38
Data Validity and Trustworthiness	39
Summary	40
V. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS	41
Overview of the Data Collection Process	41
Categorization and Coding of the Data	45
VI. FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	46
Introduction.....	46
Findings.....	46
Conclusions.....	55
Implications.....	57

Table of Contents (continued)

	PAGE
Recommendations	58
Summary	60
APPENDIX	
A. Consent Letter/Form	62
B. Interview Questions	63
C. Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs	64
REFERENCES	65

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE		PAGE
1.	Graphical Representation of Relationship Among Variables	30

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
1.	The Number of Families Requesting Emergency Shelter in Prestige County Over a Four-Year Period	3
2.	Demographics of Persons Interviewed	42
3.	Merging Themes, from All Interviews, Which were Associated with Support Services, Poverty, Stability, and Quality Education.....	53

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Every night anywhere from 68,000 to over a million children go to sleep homeless in America. Of the total number of homeless people in the nation, families comprise almost one-third of this number and is the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. Additionally, this segment of homelessness is headed by women with at least two children below the age of six years. The number of children and youth in homeless situations (PreK-12) identified by State Departments of Education increased from approximately 841,700 in 1997 to 930,200 in 2000 (U.S. Department of Education 2000). The Urban Institute estimates that an estimated 1.35 million children will experience homelessness over the course of a year (Urban Institute, 2000). Preschool and elementary age children compose the largest numbers of children experiencing homelessness reported by the State Departments of Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2000).

Looking beyond current numbers, The National Center on Family Homelessness (NCFH) predicts that tight housing markets accompanied by decreasing availability of cash benefits as a result of welfare reform will continue to lead to an increase in family homelessness. Families have remained the fastest growing segment of the homeless population, accounting for almost 40% of the nation's homeless. More than 85% of homeless families are headed by single mothers, with the average homeless family

comprised of a young mother and her two young children, most of who are below the age of six years (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999).

For most children, homelessness is not a brief or singular experience; it is a period fraught with educational and emotional setbacks that can last for years. Without permanent housing, children are forced to endure frequent moves from motels to the homes of relatives and friends to shelters and back again. They are America's nomads—moving at a rate 16 times greater than that of the average American family (Bartlet, 1997).

According to the Impact Group (Mitchell, Peed, & Ramsey, 2006), a non-profit organization serving the homeless population in Prestige County (the pseudonym for the larger metropolitan school district), the newest and growing face of homelessness are families who have lost their home through foreclosure or eviction with few resources for resettlement. Most of these families are working but have major problems with debt. Last year, there were more than 20,000 evictions, mostly for non-payment or rent – out of 70,000 rental unit. Out of almost 180,000 owner-occupied homes, there were over 6,000 residential foreclosures in Prestige County (Georgia Department of Community Affairs, 2006).

Many families living in Prestige County have experienced two or more homeless episodes within the past five years or have remained homeless for at least one year or longer. The accommodations include extended-stay motels, self-storage for a while until funds were available for something better, storage rooms at their place of employment, automobiles or wooded areas, jail—when arrested for sleeping in public places, or double

or tripled-up at a friend's house or apartment. Homelessness is no more permanent than homeownership or renting. It is a difficult episode in these families' lives, not a permanent condition (Mitchell, Peed, & Ramsey, 2006).

Over the past five years in Prestige County, wages have remained stagnant while the costs for utilities, transportation, health care, and food have risen. All of which has caused an increase in the number of families seeking emergency shelter (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Number of Families Requesting Emergency Shelter in Prestige County Over a Four-Year Period

Year	Emergency Shelter—Motel Vouchers			
	Number of Request	Number of Households Served	Number of Persons Served	Number of Children in Households
2003	5,994	325	1,362	896
2004	6,716	364	1,456	804
2005	6,232	339	1,356	922
2006	7,003	413	1,651	1,140

Since there are no family shelters, and the largest groups of homeless persons are those in family groups, many are living in places that were not traditional homeless abodes. Seventy percent of Prestige's homeless population can be found in extended-stay motels (Mitchell, Peed, & Ramsey, 2006).

In response to homelessness in Prestige County, the Coalition for Health & Human Services has coordinated the county's continuum of care through numerous non-profit organizations and the school district. Organizing a "coalition around common human needs" (Blau, 1992, p. 181) will link homeless advocacy to other social change groups. To achieve a more democratic political system responsive to the needs of the less privileged, labor would have to unite with community-based organizations and also work harder to organize the unorganized. In addition, the politics of identity would have to be refashioned with a new vision that can mobilize grassroots organizations around a populist democratic and progressive platform. This will mean moving from the ideology of individual empowerment to collective empowerment (Wright, 1997, p. 317) and direct action. It will mean placing more resources into the hands of the poor and homeless, offering collective mobility and collective resources to the homeless (Wright, 2000).

The creation of an advisory board has been in place in Prestige County for the past year. The advisory board consists of school board members, community leaders, business leaders, churches, and nonprofit organizations. However, despite Prestige's community efforts to assist the homeless, the county government refuses to accept the fact that there is indeed a homeless crisis in Prestige County. Homelessness will end only with the widespread recognition that all societies have a responsibility to provide their citizens with decent and affordable housing, excellent health care, stable, meaningful, and well-paid employment, and freedom from arbitrary exercise of state and private authority—and when these are implemented (Wright, 2000).

The school district in Prestige County has followed the policy and guidelines required to meet the needs of the homeless population according to the McKinney-Vento Act. There are currently two liaisons appointed to work with the homeless population. However, Prestige County government has turned a blind eye to the homeless crisis based on the absence of a shelter. There are no shelters for women and children in Prestige County.

Although some progress has been made in describing the homeless population and some of the causes of the problems, not much is known about the ethnic percentage of homeless people in Prestige County. Differences in gender and age characteristics were reported by certain organizations who worked with the homeless populations. Current efforts to understand who were homeless indicate that certain ethnic groups were disproportionately high and were continuing to increase in comparison to other groups, especially in large urban areas. How can schools ensure that homeless children and youth have access to basic services, and continuous education, and mainstream school activities? How can school provide for the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, and health care as well as the social, psychological, and educational needs of homeless children and youth?

Homeless children, like all children, have different levels of resilience. The length of time without a home, the reason for homelessness, the availability of support systems, and the age, sex, and temperament of the child all contribute to a particular child's reaction to being homeless. For many children, the stress of homeless life frequently causes high levels of depression and anxiety and low self-esteem. Many

children deal with their emotional states by engaging in either aggressive or withdrawn behavior. Other more specific behaviors, such as truancy, hyperactivity, dependent behaviors, or underachievement, may become pronounced. Lack of nutrition and lack of sleep, the latter caused by the noise of shelters or the child's stress level, often result in cognitive difficulties in reading and calculating and in difficulties in concentrating. Suicidal feelings are common among children over 5 years of age (Rosenman & Stein, 1990). The constant barrage of stressful and traumatic experiences has had profound effects on the cognitive and emotional development of homeless children (The National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999).

While the growth of homelessness among children continues to increase, the educational challenges have grown as a result. Forty-one percent of homeless children are under the age of five. Cognitive development during these formative years is critical for future academic success (Shore, 1997). Yet, living in extended-stay motels offers little opportunity for learning and emotional growth. As a result, many of these children experienced developmental delays (Rafferty & Rollins, 1989).

Homelessness placed many hurdles between children and educational success. Instability, poor health and nutrition, problems enrolling, and parent under-education prevent children from obtaining the consistency in the classroom that was so crucial to the learning process (Nunez, 2006).

Children are constantly being transferred from school to school due to multiple relocations for adequate shelter. The effects of school transfers can be long-lasting. It

takes a child four to six months to recover academically from such transfers. Regular school attendance is imperative for academic success (Heyback & Nix-Hodes, 1999).

Many homeless parents are ill-equipped to provide their children with educational support. They do not have a high school diploma and typically read at a sixth grade level (Homes for the Homeless, 1993). They often feel unprepared or too intimidated to become involved in their child's schooling. As a result, their children are more likely to be left behind, repeat a grade, or placed in special education classes (Nunez, 2006).

Purpose of the Study

With the constant increase in the number of homeless families, it is important for school personnel to be aware of some of the specific conditions that life in a shelter, motel, or double-up situations can bring and how these conditions affect children. Then it becomes possible to select appropriate strategies.

The purpose of this study was to determine factors associated with educating homeless children and how they impact the quality of education in a large metropolitan school district. School personnel, teachers, homeless families, and representatives of organizations will be interviewed in order to hear their point of view concerning the homelessness crisis. The results of this study will hopefully assist school districts and administrators to understand better how being homeless affects school success.

Background of the Problem

While the seeds of homelessness were planted in the 1960s and 1970s with deinstitutionalization of mentally ill people and loss of affordable housing stock, widespread homelessness did not emerge until the 1980s. In 1985, families accounted for

27% of the homeless population; by 1990 that figure had risen to 34%. In 1990, the demand for shelter for families in major cities increased by an average of 17% over the 1989 level, with some cities reporting increase of 60% (Linehan, 1992). In addition to families of whom information can be obtained (those in the shelter system), there are nearly 14 million “hidden homeless,” according to a study conducted by Rutgers University (1989).

Several factors have affected the growth of homelessness over the past two decades. Housing has become scarcer for those with little money. Earnings from employment and from benefits have not kept pace with the cost of housing or low income and poor people. Services that every family needs for support and stability have become harder for very poor people to afford or find (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2007).

In addition to these systemic causes, social changes have increased the personal problems of many poor Americans, leading them to be more vulnerable to homelessness. These social trends have included senior citizens, military veterans, youth, ages 16-20 and single moms with two or three with low earning power, and thinning support networks.

The extent of homeless among the school-age population is unclear. The National Coalition for the Homeless (2007) estimated the school-age population at 500,000 to 750,000. Approximately 43% of these were thought to be not attending school on a regular basis. As with other aspects of enumerating the extent of homeless, the level of school enrollment of homeless children was disputed. A study conducted by the Stanford

University Center for the Study of Families, Children, and Youth (Fisher & George, 1994) found that nearly 90% of homeless children were enrolled in school.

Of these homeless families, research suggests that more than three-fourths are typically single-parent families headed by women (Waxman & Reyes, 1990).

Homelessness is a complex problem. The causes are myriad; no single factor or combination of factors can explain homelessness. The causes can include economic problems including unemployment or underemployment, or restrictions in social support programs. Causes can be related to personal problems including substance abuse, physical and or mental health, or family problems. No population is more at-risk of school failure, if not outright school exclusion, than the homeless. Homelessness places the educational opportunity of these students in jeopardy by creating formidable barriers associated with their homelessness (financial barriers and transiency) and those related to the organization of schools (residency requirements, transportation, attendance requirements, legal barriers, service impediments, and social and psychological concerns) (Fisher, 1994).

Families and children who become homeless do not fit one general description. However, these families and children experiencing homelessness do have certain shared basic needs, including affordable housing, adequate incomes, and health care (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Being homeless puts a tremendous strain on everyone involved. Some of the common tendencies often exhibited by children who are homeless include acting out,

restlessness, aggressiveness, hyperactivity, and persistence tiredness and anxiety (Linehan, 1992). Residence in a shelter is not conducive to good parenting, nutrition, or hygiene; provides no sense of stability; and offers little privacy for homework or family interaction. A child living in shelter is helpless to physical, mental, and emotional disorders because the whole experience tends to decrease the child's primary protective structure, the family. Further, shelter life may expose children to violence as victims, witnesses, or even participants.

Some feelings suffered by homeless children can take a great toll on their academic success—fatigue can destroy concentration, hopelessness can undermine initiative, and anger can cause added behavior (First & Oakley, 1993). Many need comprehensive support for recovery. Some exhibit little evidence of the turmoil in their lives, but can benefit from support that helps them achieve to their full potential (Eddowes, 1992). This research aims to determine those factors that are related to educating homeless children in a large metropolitan school district.

Significance of the Study

With the increase of homelessness among families and children, there is a need to improve our educational system by meeting the needs of the homeless population within our communities. The role of education in the life of a homeless child is crucial. In a life filled with uncertainty, school is a place of safety. Something as simple as a desk to call their own can provide a homeless child with a sense of routine and ownership. A free, appropriate public education is also a right to which homeless children and youth are legally entitled. This right put into practice has the potential to break the cycle of poverty

and homelessness that may otherwise continue. For homeless children and youth, the importance of a stable, quality education is immeasurable (Child Welfare League of America, 2007).

Research on the impact of homelessness on children indicates that homeless children confront serious threats to their wellbeing. An entire generation of children faces truly unacceptable risks that jeopardize their future potential. In the long run, the monetary costs of neglecting children's needs are likely to substantially exceed the cost of combating poverty and homelessness. The human costs will be much more tragic. Our cities and our nation must develop an appropriate and effective response (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991).

The findings from this research provided school district, local schools, community leaders, and organizations a blueprint on how to best meet the needs of children who were homeless. Understanding the McKinney-Vento Act has enhanced those programs that were currently in place. The interviews of the families and children experiencing homelessness provided insight on how to make learning effective, meaningful, and relevant.

Research Questions

The intent of this study is to answer the following research questions based on the perception of homelessness in education:

RQ1: Is there a significant relationship between support services and the quality of education received by homeless students?

- RQ2: Is there a significant relationship between poverty and the quality of education received by homeless students?
- RQ3: Is there a significant relationship between stability and the quality of education received by homeless students?
- RQ4: What other factors are associated with the quality of education received by homeless students?
- RQ5: How can school districts improve the factors associated with the quality of education received by homeless students?

Summary

Homelessness is a growing phenomenon. Children are the fastest growing population of homelessness. Without proper services and resources, the inability to focus in school would come to a halt. The policies and procedures that are mandated fail to take a closer look at the main issue affecting homeless children and their families. It is imperative for school districts to view the connections to factors associated with educating homeless children and create programs conducive to assisting those who are without the basic needs.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The intent of this chapter is to review educational research and literature that is related to selected variables affecting the quality of education among homeless children. The literature is outlined by related research on the variables of the study. The independent variables include support services, poverty, and stability. The dependent variable is quality of education. The review of literature is divided into four sections. The first section highlights the factors associated with educating homeless children. The second section provides the components of what quality education means. The third section displays the function of the Stewart B. McKinney Act. The concluding section summarizes the review of literature.

Factors Associated with Educating Homeless Children

Support Services

Despite the growing number of homeless families and their acute needs, support services and resources available to help them are limited especially in Prestige County. The over arching problem is the severe lack of resources available to address homelessness and housing needs in general. In most cities, emergency shelter requests have increased, as have requests for permanent housing. In some cities, applicants for assisted housing (public housing, Section 8 certificates, and vouchers) face long waiting

lists, while in other, the waits are so long the applications are no longer being accepted (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005).

There are countless literature that addresses homeless families and the lack of support services that are non-existent. During the late 80s, the most significant work was done by Yvonne Rafferty, who interviewed families in emergency shelters in New York. Rafferty (1991) assessed statistical data collected by the Board of Education comparing school performance and attendance of children temporarily housed, and those with permanent housing. She found that:

- 91% of children living in shelters were attending school but were not given the option to enroll at their home school or attend the school nearest their temporary housing.
- Parents found it burdensome to accompany their younger children to school because they needed time to appear at social welfare agencies in order to find housing.
- Reading achievement, mathematics achievement, holdover rates, and school attendance suffered dramatically for homeless children.

Rafferty concluded that the ability to be educated is severely affected by homelessness, that homelessness has a dramatic impact on the number of different schools attended, and that the number of school transfers correlates with the number of shelters the children had stayed in. Finally, she concluded that school performance was powerfully affected by homelessness.

Support services can help children and their families stabilize following a successful housing placement and provide the supports necessary to ensure that they are able to sustain their housing and access other community-based services. For families that have been chronically homeless, such supports should be on-going, readily accessible, and attached to housing. The majority of children and their families who experience homelessness do not require permanent supportive housing, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2007), intensive services must be available on a transitional basis before and after a family has moved into housing. With these components in place, academic achievement is attainable, attendance will improve, and homelessness would cease.

On the school level, support services must be well acquainted with the homelessness phenomenon. It is a growing problem and the Health and Human Services Department in the school systems must be prepared to embrace these families who are experiencing destitution, hunger, poverty, and shame. Training must be ongoing in order to meet the different needs of children and their families who are without a home.

School stability and continuity in school enrollment were associated with school success including achievement, promotion, and graduation. Research studies have indicated that a child may lose 4-6 months of academic progress with each move to a new school. The importance of a child attending one school and of attending consistently (in one school or in several schools without gaps during a transition if the child must change schools) cannot be underestimated. Consistent with the intent of the No Child Left Behind Act, the provision of services to the neediest of students is essential to closing the

academic achievement gap between students most at risk of failure and those least at risk. Homeless students frequently move from school to school before eligibility for specialized programs can be determined or before they can rise high enough on waiting lists to be admitted to programs. Programs must find ways to accommodate their eligibility policies and procedures to address the needs of highly mobile students (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Poverty

Homelessness and poverty are inextricably linked. Poor people are frequently unable to pay for housing, food, child care, health care, and education. Difficult choices must be made when limited resources cover only some of these necessities. Often it is housing, which absorbs a high proportion of income that must be dropped. Being poor means being an illness, an accident, or a paycheck away from living on the streets (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007).

In 2005, 13.3% of the U.S. population, or 38,231,521 million people, lived in poverty. Both the poverty rate and the number of poor people have increased in recent years, up from 2.5% or 1.1 million in 2003 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2005). Thirty-six percent of persons living in poverty are children; in fact, the 2004 poverty rate of 17.6% for children under 18 years old is significantly higher than the poverty rate for any other age group.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless (1998), there are two major factors that have increased the poverty level. They are eroding employment

opportunities for large segments of the workforce, and declining value and availability of public assistance.

The media is constantly reporting the existence of a recession due to a growing economy, low unemployment, and the rising number of foreclosures which are the reasons why homelessness persists. These reasons include low wages and less security in a job with little or no benefits.

While the last few years have seen growth in real wages at all levels, these increases have not been enough to counteract a long pattern of stagnant and declining wages. Low wage workers have been particularly hard hit by wage trends and have been left behind as the disparity between rich and poor has mushroomed. To compound the problem, the real value of the minimum wage in 2004 was 26% less than in 1979 (The Economic Policy Institute, 2005).

The declining value and availability of public assistance is another source of increasing poverty and homelessness. Until its repeal in August 1996, the largest cash assistance program for poor families with children was the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (the federal welfare reform law) repealed the AFDC program and replace it with a block grant program called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). Current TANF benefits and Food Stamps combined are below the poverty level in every state; in fact, the current maximum TANF benefit for a single mother of two children is 29% of the federal poverty level (Nickelson, 2004).

Moreover, extreme poverty is growing more common for children, especially those in female headed households and working families. This increase can be traced directly to the declining number of children lifted above one-half of the poverty line by government cash assistance for the poor (Children's Defense Fund and National Coalition for the Homeless, 1998).

Jonathan Kozol (1988), noted author and advocate of underprivileged children and their families, has written numerous books and articles on race, poverty, and education. After spending time in a homeless shelter and speaking with women and children who befriended him, Kozol decided to write a day by day book on the struggles of living in poverty and homelessness. The book entitled, *Rachel and her Children: Homeless Families in America*, displays horrific conditions homeless families and children endured on a daily basis. The focus of the book was:

Not on ancillary aspects of the fact of homelessness. It was on the meaning of that fact. The emphasis was not on individuals, though individual homeless people will be seen and heard from in the pages of the book; the focus is on families and children. The focus was on the way the homelessness creates an underclass, enhances the underclass that may already have existed, and, combining newly poor and always-poor together in one common form of penury, and assigns the children of them all to an imperiled life. (Kozol, 1988, p. 24)

Stability

Where homelessness is concerned, children need continuity and stability.

Homeless children and youth frequently move, and maintaining a stable school environment is critical to their success in school. To ensure this stability, the Local Educational Agencies (LEA) must make school placement determinations on the basis of the “best interest” of the homeless child or youth. Using this standard, an LEA must:

- (a) Continue the child’s or youth’s education in the school of origin or the duration of homelessness when a family becomes homeless between academic years or during an academic year; or for the remainder of the academic year if the child or youth becomes permanently housed during an academic year; or
- (b) Enroll the child or youth in any public school that non-homeless students who live in the attendance area in which the child or youth is actually living are eligible to attend (United States Department of Education, 2004).

When deciding what would be in the best interest of the child, the LEA must, to the extent feasible, keep a homeless child in their “school of origin” unless it goes against the parent’s request. If an LEA sends a child to a school other than the school of origin or parental request, the LEA must provide a written explanation of the decision and placement.

Changing schools significantly impedes a student’s academic and social growth. The literature on highly mobile students indicates that it can take a student four to six months to recover academically after changing schools. Highly mobile students have also been found to have lower test scores and overall academic performance than peers

who do not change schools. Therefore, the McKinney-Vento Act calls for LEAs to maintain students in their school of origin to the extent feasible (United States Department of Education, 2004).

The instability and chaotic nature of homelessness can have profound effects on a child's physical health, psychological development, and academic achievement. Physically, there are much higher rates of acute and chronic health problems, hunger and poor nutrition, and developmental delays (Thompson, 1998; Duffield, Heybach, and Julianelle, 2002). Psychological symptoms include depression, anxiety; conduct disorders (MacLean, Embry, & Cauce, 1999; Thompson, Pollio, Constantin, Reid, & Nebbitt, 2002) and post-traumatic stress (Cauce, Paradise, Ginzler, Embry, Morgan, & Lohr, 2000). Achieving their educational potential is difficult for homeless children as they are twice as likely to repeat a grade or be suspended from school, and many attend three or more different schools in a year (Better Homes Fund, 1999). Of the one third that miss more than 10 days, a fourth missed a month or more (Holloway, 2002, 2003).

Unstable living situations increase the likelihood of experiencing physical and emotional health problems as well as learning difficulties. Frequent moves often leave children feeling like outsiders making it difficult for them to forge and maintain friendships. Their lives feel out of control, which frequently results in anxiety and depression. In addition, high mobility often impedes progress toward reaching their full educational potential, which can trap them in a cycle of poverty (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006).

In one year, 42% transferred schools at least once. Of these, 51% transferred twice or more (Institute for Children and Poverty, 2003); 23% will attend three or more different schools in one year (National Center on Family Homelessness, 1999). With each change in schools, it is estimated that a student is set back academically by an average of four to six months (Rogers, 1991). Many homeless children lack basic school supplies and a reasonable environment in which to do homework (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006). Three quarters of older homeless youths drop out of school (Cauce, et al., 2000).

Often, homeless children survive by discovering school to be an oasis in the midst of turmoil (Slavin, 2001). Education offers many critical life skills and is a strong predictor of the ability to overcome poverty and become independent. But being homeless impacts children and youth in a variety of ways that adversely affect their ability to enroll, attend, and succeed in school. Overcoming these barriers is one of the most promising means of breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty (National Center for Homeless Education, 2006).

Stable housing contributes significantly to children's long-term educational success. Collaboration is key to the efficient integration of resources needed to achieve educational success for children and economic stability for their families. Access to supportive services is essential for families working to overcome significant challenges to housing and stability.

Quality Education

Homelessness has a particularly adverse effect on educational progress because of problems with attendance and access to schools, as well as the isolation that children can feel because of their traumatic circumstances (Rubin, Erickson, Agustin, Cleary, Allen, & Cohen, 1996). Without stable housing, funds, and support services, receiving a quality education would be beyond reach.

Quality education is a prerequisite for education for sustainable development.

Education for sustainable development has four major thrusts:

- Promoting and improving Basic Education
- Reorienting existing education programs all levels to address sustainable development
- Developing public awareness and understanding of sustainability
- Providing training (United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization, 2008).

Quality Education:

- Supports a rights-based approach to all educational endeavors. Education is a human right, and therefore quality education supports all of the human rights;
- Is based on the four pillars of education for all—learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and with others, and learning to be (Delors, 1996).

- Views the learner as an individual, a family member, community member, and a global citizen and educates to create individual competency in all four roles;
- Upholds and conveys the ideals of a sustainable world—a world that is just, equitable, and peaceable, in which individuals care for the environment to contribute to intergenerational equity;
- Takes into consideration the social, economic, and environmental contexts of a particular place and shapes the curriculum or program to reflect these unique conditions. Quality education is locally relevant and culturally appropriate;
- Is informed by the past (e.g. indigenous and traditional knowledge), is relevant to the present, and prepares individuals for the future;
- Builds knowledge, life skills, perspectives, attitudes and values;
- Provides the tools to transform current societies to more sustainable societies;
- Is measurable (United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization, 2008).

McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Assistance Act

In order to guarantee that all homeless children receive a quality education, Congress authorized the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act to protect the rights of homeless students and to ensure that they received the same quality and appropriate education that other students received.

In 1987, Congress recognized the problems in the education of homeless children and created a law which would provide access to education with the option, depending on

individual need, to continue schooling in a child's home school. The Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987 was a bill which was passed over the objections of the Reagan administration. In brief, the law required states to assure that homeless children and youth have access to a free and appropriate public education. The McKinney Act required that all school districts enroll homeless children without permanent residence of the school district; provide comparable services to homeless children; and maintain the records of homeless children so that records are made available when a child or youth enters a new school (Colorado Board of Education, 1994).

In 1994, the McKinney Act was reauthorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The new amendments were:

- Emphasized opportunity for students who are homeless to meet the same performance as all students.
- Identified preschool services as an acceptable funded program activity.
- Allowed services to be provided at sites other than on the school grounds
- Required coordination with local social service agencies and programs serving homeless children and youth.
- Allowed flexibility in budgeting to meet the identified needs of homeless children and youth at the local level.

To address the educational barriers faced by homeless children and youth, Congress once again passed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act which was reauthorized by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. It contains a specific definition

of homelessness that includes a common array of inadequate living situations. The McKinney-Vento Act guarantees homeless children and youth the following:

- The right to immediate enrollment in school, even if lacking paperwork normally required for enrollment.
- The right to attend school in hi/her school of origin or in the school in the attendance area where the family or youth is currently residing.
- The right to receive transportation to his/her school of origin, if this is requested by the parent.
- The right to services comparable to those received by housed schoolmates, including transportation and supplemental educational services.
- The posting of homeless students' rights in all schools and other places around the community.

In addition to these rights, the McKinney-Vento Act provides funds to states and local school districts to implement the Act (National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth, 2007).

Although the Stewart B. McKinney Act has been in place for over 20 years, it has not reduced the numbers of families living without shelter. It has forced a more punitive response from local politicians and policy makers, criminalization (Barak, 1992; Fischer, 1992; National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, 1999; Stoner, 1995), and containment. In February 2008, Prestige County government decreed that all homeless individuals camped out in the woods is removed by law enforcement immediately. Discouraging loitering in public places, anti-camping and anti-panhandling ordinances,

and arrests or detention for “quality of life” crimes were complemented by the attempt to contain homeless persons in institutional shelters and facilities—out of sight of the general public, especially the tourist trade. As more and more people living in the streets are arrested for violating local panhandling or camping ordinances or harassed into hiding in remote areas of a city, their disappearance from tourist areas and other public spaces creates the illusion that homelessness as a social problem is ending (Wright, 2000).

Summary

Despite the growing number of homeless families and their acute needs, resources available to help them are limited. The overarching problem is the severe lack of resources available to address homelessness and housing needs in general. In most U.S. cities, emergency shelter requests have increased as have requests for permanent housing. In some cities, applicants for assisted housing (public housing, Section 8 certificates, and vouchers) face long waiting lists while in others, the waits are so long that applications are not longer being accepted (U.S. Conference of Mayors, 2005).

The quality of education played a pivotal role in meeting the needs of homeless children. Every child requires stability and support in order to succeed in school. Without proper support services, poverty and instability will continue to exist among children who have fallen prey to homelessness.

Moreover, it is imperative, for the parents of these children, to obtain permanent housing. Lack of support services, the existence of poverty, and unstable living conditions play a crucial part in whether or not a child receives a quality education. In

order to provide sustainable development among children that are homeless, their basic needs must be met first and foremost. The effects of homelessness, upon the parents of these children, are distressful and can manifest into a cycle of hopelessness throughout a child's life.

The current literature revealed that children view school as a safe haven, a place conducive to learning. Stability was a major requirement to ensure school success. Constant mobility caused many health issues that destroyed a child's zest for learning and living. Simply arresting and/or hiding homeless individuals and placing these persons in shelters or jail were similar to putting a band-aid on a wound that has not been properly treated. Homeless people must be helped.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant relationship between support services, stability, and poverty and the impact these factors had on the quality of education among homeless children. The dependent variable in this study was the quality of education, and the independent variables were support services, stability, and poverty.

Definition of Variables and Terms

The following terms were defined in order to create a frame of reference for this study.

Case Managers: Individuals who help provide homeless families with needed resources and services, such as, crisis intervention, short-term stabilization, needs assessment, assistance with application for additional services, and housing plan.

Homeless children and youth:

- A. Individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence and includes—children and youths who are sharing the housing or other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reason;
- B. Individuals living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; are abandoned in hospitals; or are awaiting foster care placement;

- C. Children and youths who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings;
- D. Children and youths who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and
- E. migratory children who qualify as homeless for the purposes of this subtitle because the children are living in circumstances described in clauses (i) through (iii) (McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 2001 – Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act – Sec 725).

McKinney-Vento Act: A program designed to address the problems that homeless children and youth have faced in enrolling, attending, and succeeding in school. Under this program, state educational agencies must ensure that each homeless child and youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education, including a public preschool education, as other children and youth.

Poverty: The lack of basic human needs, including food, water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, and education. For example, one person making 10,294.00 per year, two people making 13,167.00 per year, three people making 16,079.00 per year, four people making 20,614.00 per year, and five people making 24,382.00 per year are all considered living below the poverty line.

Quality Education: Consists of strong leadership, quality instruction, standards, ongoing assessment and accountability, adequate and equitable resources, parental and

community involvement. Quality education will prepare students to be lifelong learners and productive citizens.

Educational Stability: Allowing homeless children to remain in their school of origin even if homelessness has caused them to move outside the school district.

School of Origin: The school a student attends before becoming homeless or the school where the student was last enrolled.

Support Services: Services offered to homeless children which include public preschool programs, educational programs or services for children with disabilities, programs for students with limited English proficiency, vocational education, programs for gifted and talented students, before-and after-school programs, school nutrition programs, and transportation.

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the relationship among the variables.

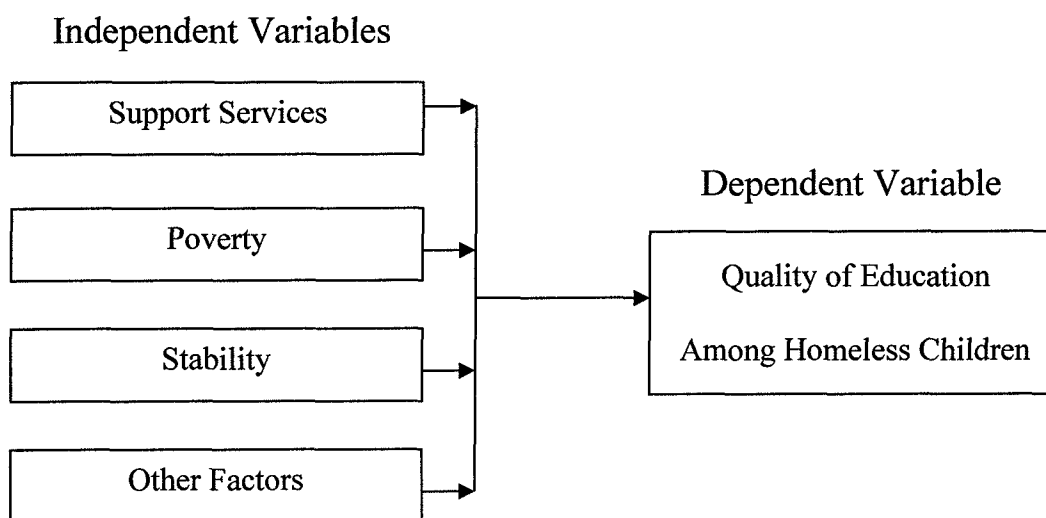


Figure 1. Graphical Representation of the Relationship Among Variables

Assumptions

For many years, the perception of homelessness centered on individuals who lacked education, were not employed, and lived on government supports. When in fact, most homeless individuals have college degrees, work two or three jobs at a time, and because of being employed receiving minimal wages, have difficulty applying for support from many government agencies and organizations, when times are tough.

What has occurred in our society is economic hardship. Due to the rising cost of food, fluctuating mortgage rates, rent space, and gas, people are finding it difficult to survive. Families are truly living pay check to pay check and if a crisis arises, many of the household funds go towards that crisis leaving major bills unpaid.

Declining wages have put housing out of reach for many workers: in every state, more than the minimum wage is required to afford a one- or two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent. Currently, the foreclosure rate is at an all time high (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007).

For many Americans, work provided no escape from poverty. The benefits of economic growth have not been equally distributed; instead, they have been concentrated at the top of income and wealth distributions. A rising tide does not lift all boats, and in the United States today, many boats are struggling to stay afloat (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007).

This qualitative research explored the connections between factors associated with educating homeless students and the quality education received by homeless children.

Scope and Limitations

The following limitations occurred while conducting the research.

1. The availability of data of student success rate was limited due to the rate of transience from school to school.
2. The agency granting permission to interview did not provide an area of privacy to conduct interviews.
3. Due to high absenteeism, homeless students were not in school to take advantage of a quality education implemented by school district.
4. The nonexistence of a shelter for women and children is due in part by Prestige County government refusal to acknowledge that there is a homeless problem growing in leaps and bound within the community.

Summary

This chapter described the terminology used in this study in order to provide a thorough understanding of what has been discussed. It also displayed a model of how the independent variables connected with the dependent variable.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine factors associated with educating homeless children and how they will impact the quality of education in a large metropolitan school district. This chapter discusses specifically the research design, description of the settings, data collection procedures, data analysis process, and data validity and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Research Design

Qualitative research was selected for this study because it took an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the subject matter such as homelessness in education.

Qualitative research provided a rich description about providing a visual of the true life experiences of homeless children and their families. The approach implemented was phenomenological research. This phenomenological study described the meaning for several individuals of their life experiences of a concept or a phenomenon.

Phenomenologist focused on describing what all participants had in common. The basic purpose phenomenology was to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence—a “Grasp of the very nature of the thing” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 177). The purpose of this study was to hold interviews with representatives of organizations who assisted in helping those who were homeless.

Interviews were conducted to investigate homeless families' views related to their current situation and how school districts met the needs of the homeless population. Substantial time was spent in talking with social service providers about their case load and recommendations.

Access and Entry Process

Access into the Municipal Ministry, the pseudonym for the organization providing assistance to the homeless used in this study, was obtained by a written and verbal request to the Executive Director of the program. After permission was given, the researcher requested to collect data from families who were experiencing homelessness.

Access into the local school district administrative offices, local elementary school and United Way was obtained by written and verbal request by the social workers that worked with homeless children and their families.

Description of the Settings

The Municipal Ministry is a faith-based, non-profit, universal ministry that is dedicated to providing emergency assistance to families in the southeastern region of Georgia. The Municipal Ministry is supported by 20 local churches and many businesses, civic and social organizations, foundations, and individuals.

Due to economic hardship, fixed income, homelessness, abuse, language restraints, and other issues, the Ministry serves 50 to 70 families per day. The services include food, clothing, financial assistance, ESOL classes, job ministry, small support groups and referrals.

Part of this study took place in one of the largest school system in Georgia. The school district has over 100 schools and other educational facilities. It serves over 100,000 students daily. Each school is placed in a cluster determined by attendance zones. The department of interest was the Health and Human Services Department. Within this department were two social workers responsible for working with the homeless population.

Cart Elementary School, the pseudonym for the elementary school at which this study was conducted, is located outside of the city. The enrollment of over 1,000, for 2007-2008 included the following ethnic composition: 8% Asian, 20% black, 65% Hispanic, 3% white, and 4% multicultural; 90% of the students received free or reduced lunch and 53% are ESOL. There was one social worker designated to assist those students and their families with support services. The social worker oversees the entire school.

United Way is an organization that helps people from every part of our community by working together on human care issues that are gravely important. United Way is committed to improving communities, families, and the overall quality of life.

United Way values:

- All members of the community
- Working on important issues
- Work ethics with an open mind
- Civic action
- Volunteers, donors and partners

- Integrity and efficient use of resources
- Accountability and transparency (United Way of Gwinnett, 2008)

Description of the Family Focus Group

A focus group from the Municipal Ministry was formed. The focus group was randomly selected. The focus group consisted of five African-American women between the ages of 30-40. At this time, the purpose and intent of the study was fully explained to each participant.

Before the focus group commenced, each participant was asked to read and sign a consent letter/form (see Appendix A). The consent letter/form consisted of the purpose of the study and a statement assuring confidentiality.

Description of the Individuals Interviewed

In addition to the focus group, five other women were randomly chosen for this study. The five women ages ranged from 30-70 years old. The ethnic composition included: 4 African-Americans and 1 Russian. During this time, the purpose and intent of the study was fully explained to each participant. Each participant was asked to read and sign a consent letter/form. The consent letter/form consisted of the purpose of the study and a statement assuring confidentiality.

Prestige (Pseudonym) School District, Cart (Pseudonym) Elementary School, and United Way

This study was conducted with permission from each participant. The purpose and intent of the study was fully explained to each participant. The participants consisted of two social workers, local and district level, and two representatives from United Way.

Data Collection Procedures

The first step in the data collection process was to conduct in-depth interviews with representatives from each organization that assisted those families and children who were homeless. According to Bogdin and Biklen (2006), an interview is a purposeful conversation, usually between two people, but sometimes involving more (Morgan, 1997), that is directed by one in order to get information from the other. During the interview stage, field notes were gathered from each session. These field notes provided a written account of what was heard, seen, experienced, and thought in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data.

After all of the participants were selected, each was asked a series of questions included in subsequent sections, which related to the factors associated with educating homeless children, the quality of education received, and recommendations for improvement.

Speaking with support service providers, agencies and organization, each provided useful data for the study. The benefit and purpose of speaking with representatives from the organizations were to gather a sampling from each group. The concept of purposeful sampling was used in this qualitative research. This means that the

researcher selected individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2007).

Each interview was recorded and transcribed; and field notes were taken of all the responses. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Conducting individual interviews provided data for an in-depth view of the responses from the participants. During all of the interview sessions, field notes were taken, which displayed each participants' expressions and emotions. All field notes were recorded in a personal log. Maintaining a personal log was extremely useful to the researcher and helped to keep track of the development of the research project and maintained records of how the researcher had been influenced by the collected data (Bogdan & Bilken, 2006).

Data Analysis Process

Each individual interview, along with the focus group interview and organizational personnel, was transcribed. Common themes and patterns were noted based on the transcribed data. The following themes that emerged from this study were: lack of affordable housing, temporary assistance from support services, access to services, lack of case managers, child care expenses, lack of after school programs, and availability of transportation. These common themes had a direct relationship with the factors associated with educating homeless children and their families. The factors consisted of support services, poverty, stability, and quality education. A comparison analysis was coded, organized, and synthesized based on the responses from each interview. Finally, the data were placed into a table, broken down into manageable units.

Data Validity and Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have used alternative terms, such as “credibility,” “authenticity,” “transferability,” “dependability,” and “conformability,” as “the naturalist’s equivalents” for “internal validation,” “external validation,” “reliability,” and “objectivity” (p. 300). To operationalize these new terms, they propose techniques such as prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data of sources, methods, and investigators to establish credibility (Creswell, 2007).

The first process to ensuring credibility of the findings within the study was implemented by triangulation. Triangulation is many sources of data which include multiple subjects, multiple researchers, different theoretical approaches and different data-collecting techniques (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006). In this research, data sources included the focus group, eight individuals, field notes and a personal log.

The final process in ensuring credibility was peer debriefing. According to Guba and Lincoln (as cited in Creswell, 2007b) peer debriefing is defined as “the process by which the researcher is kept honest” (p. 208). The peer debriefer for this research study was a colleague in another school district who was acquainted with qualitative research and understood the responsibilities of a peer debriefer. The entire data from the interviews, field notes, and personal log were shared and discussed with the peer debriefer during the research process.

Summary

The design of the study was based on the factors associated with educating homeless children. The factors included support services, poverty, stability, and quality education. The focus group and the five individuals from the Municipal Ministry were the main source of data gathered.

The validity of the study was achieved through triangulation and peer debriefing. The data collection process used in this study was rigorous. Multiple forms of data and details about them were adequately summarized, analyzed, coded, and placed into themes. The researcher listened to what each participant stated about their experiences with support services, poverty, stability, and quality education as it related to homelessness. This approach was implemented to display the horrors of destitution.

CHAPTER V

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Overview of the Data Collection Process

This chapter presents the results of the study which examined factors associated with educating homeless children and how they will impact the quality of education in a large metropolitan school district. A focus group and eight individual interviews were utilized to collect data on homeless children and their families. Data were collected over a 12-month period during the 2007-2008 school year.

The essential data presented were a collection of the lives of homeless individuals who were without shelter, food, and clothing. The thoughts and feelings expressed were derived from one focus group and eight individual interviews. A focus group and five individual interviews were formed at the Municipal Ministry. The remaining three interviews were formed at Prestige School District, the pseudonym for the school district, Cart Elementary School, and United Way.

The focus group from the Municipal Ministry consisted of five African-American women who were experiencing homelessness. The age range of the women was 30-40 years. Three of the five women were unemployed—one was a graduate student, and the other worked a minimum wage job. All five women lived in an extended-stay motel (see Table 2). According to the McKinney-Vento Act, the definition of homelessness pertains to individuals living in a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private

Table 2

Demographics of Persons Interviewed

Participant	AA = African-American				RUS = Russian		
	Race	Age Range	Jobless	Homeless	Living in Extended Stay Motel	Number of Children	Marital Status
1	AA	30-40	No	Yes, living with family	yes	Three Ages: 8, 9, 16	Married (Husband in jail)
2	AA	30-40	No	Yes.	Yes	One: 14yrs	Single
3	AA	30-40	Yes Student	Yes	Yes. School loan help support family	Three Ages: 4, 5, & 8	Single
4	AA	30-40	No	Yes	Yes	Two Ages 11 & 12	Single
5	AA	30-40	Yes/the hesitant one	Yes. Living with someone	Not sure. Was not respondent to this discussion She sort of nodded her head	She did not respond but her sister said she had two kids	Single
6	AA	60-70	Yes. Grandma retired	Yes. Use pension to survive	Yes	One grandson 9 yrs old	Husband deceased

Table 2 (continued)

AA = African-American					RUS = Russian		
Participant	Race	Age Range	Jobless	Homeless	Living in Extended Stay Motel	Number of Children	Marital Status
7	RUS	40-50	No. Has 2 jobs	No. About to be.	No.	One 18 yrs old College student	Single
8 (sisters)	AA	40-50	No	Yes. Living with family	Yes	Two grown daughters & 6 yr old boy	Single
9 (sisters)	AA	40-50	No	Yes. Living with family	Yes	One girl in High School 10 th grade	Single
10	AA	40-50	No. Graduate Student	Yes. Living in Extended Motel	Yes	Two grown daughters 23 and 20 with 10 month grandbaby and a 13 year old boy	Single

place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, such as an extended-stay motel (National Center for Homeless Education at Serve, 2006). The first participant had three children ages 8, 9, and 16; the second participant had a 14 years old; the fourth participant had three children ages 4, 5, and 8; and the fifth participant reluctantly revealed she had two children. The marital status of

the first participant was married with a husband in jail and the second through the fifth participants were all single.

The five women selected were asked to participate in a focus group. The participants were asked open-ended questions as they related to support services, poverty, stability, and quality of education. The participants were asked four questions (see Appendix B).

During the individual interview sessions at the Municipal Ministry, five women were individually interviewed. They were asked the same open-ended questions that specifically related to support services, poverty, stability, and quality of education. The ethnicity consisted of four African-Americans and one Russian. The ages ranged from 30-70 years. Four of the five women were employed with an income too small to support a family according to the poverty line. The one participant without a job was a retired grandmother (see Table 2).

During the individual interviews with the school district personnel and the representatives from United Way, information concerning social services and support was the focal point of the interviews. All three were asked to provide factors associated with educating homeless children and to site recommendations for school districts, government agencies and organizations which are designed to meet the needs of those who are struggling in life.

Categorization and Coding of the Data

The following interview questions were developed in order to address the needs of the homeless:

1. What major event happened in your life that caused you to come to the Municipal Ministry, the pseudonym for the organization providing assistance to the homeless?
2. Do you feel that you are getting the help you need to better your situation?
3. If there were some type of shelter/housing extended to you, would that make your situation better?
4. How are your children performing in school? Do they attend public school in a large metropolitan school district in the county where you live?

All questions related to the factors associated with educating homeless children. The first question was centered on poverty. The second question focused on support services. The third question focused on stability and the last question focused on quality of education.

Narrative coding was done in order to offer an account of the lives of homeless individuals which were framed in a particular way. Coding within the common themes was important to highlight connections across themes. Moreover, the intent of the interviews was to provide a visual into the life of a family who was experiencing homelessness first hand.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if there was a significant relationship between support services, poverty, stability and the quality of education received by homeless students. This summary includes a summation of the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for ongoing research.

The participants' responses were coded to determine if there were a significant relationship between the independent variables and dependent variable.

Findings

Over the past decades, there has been a tremendous shift of demographic in Prestige County in which this study was conducted. No longer is the subject county considered rural but a thriving community that has grown in leaps and bound. The population has soared so high, along with the economy, people can no longer afford to live there. Due to their inability to make ends meet, children and their families have lost their homes to the high cost of living. Do support services, poverty, and stability impact the quality of education among homeless children? These issues were proposed as research questions of the study.

Findings from Focus Group

The five participants in the focus group were asked what major event happened in their lives that caused them to seek help from the Municipal Ministry. Three of the women stated that unemployment was the culprit and the other two stated minimum job wages. All five women:

- Expressed the desire to work any job just as long as funds were being created.
- Believed that government support services were not helpful and rude
- Believed that one has to be destitute in order to receive full assistance from any support services.
- Agreed that the schools in the Prestige County were very helpful, generous, supportive, and provided quality education for their children.
- Believed that their children received excellent academic support when they were experiencing difficulties academically.
- Believed that if their housing condition was stable, then that would alleviate constant movement and transfers from school to school.
- Expressed the need for affordable childcare.
- Believed that poverty is the cause of homelessness because “your paycheck has not caught up with the economy.”

One of the biggest themes that surfaced was the need of a continuum of services that would transition a family from a temporary dwelling to permanent housing for the purpose of being stable. Providing housing and assistance would enable families to access better-quality affordable housing in more stable neighborhoods with their

children's elementary school attendance areas. If the parents are stable, the children are stable.

Another theme that emerged from the focus group was lack of affordable housing. According to the focus group, the cost of living is too expensive. Two of the women believed that because of the high price of food and gas, their teenage children have resorted to stealing food, for the family, in order to survive.

One participant, the graduate student, stated that she has done everything to get out of poverty. She has even written a letter to Oprah Winfrey asking for some help. All of the women expressed to the researcher that no one was concerned about people who were poor. They felt as if no one cared and that there was no hope. The fourth participant said that "a lot of people have given up on us. That takes a toll on you. All you can do is just pray."

Findings from Individual Interviews

The next set of interviews consisted of five individual women whose journey toward homelessness was quite different. The sixth participant was a retired grandmother, living off her pension in an extended-stay motel. Her age level was between 60-70 years. Due to her daughter's drug abuse and inability to take care of her nine year son, she ended up being the care taker to the boy. It was a struggle for her because the grandson was in need of medication for Attention Deficit Disorder and Hyperactivity (ADHD) and she could not afford it. The nine year old boy had been in six different schools during his life time and was experiencing academic problems and emotional needs according to the grandmother. This was her first time seeking assistance

at the Municipal Ministry and she was hoping that she could get a voucher for her grandson's medication along with food and clothing. In addition to providing the basic needs and medication for the grandchild, the grandmother was determined to seek guardianship of the child. Throughout the entire interview session, the grandmother chanted, "I hope they can help me. I hope they can help me," rocking back and forth in the chair.

The seventh participant interviewed was a woman from Russia who could not wait to talk to the researcher. She was working three jobs but now has two. She was seeking another job to support her son who just moved in with other relatives to go to college. Her son attended school in the subject county for which this study pertained to and performed well academically but decided after graduation to move with relatives due to lack of resources—basic needs that his mother could no longer provide. The mother's mortgage lapsed and she could no longer pay the bills. She packed all of her belonging and was awaiting assistance from the Municipal Ministry. She stated that the resources and support services were limited because she works. She also stated that her paychecks were not enough to cover food and the cost of living. She expressed a desire to work with a case manager for assistance with affordable housing and employment in order to help her son, financially, who is attending college.

The eighth and ninth participants were sisters and each shared their views on being homeless. Both were single African-American women who lost their jobs due to being laid off. If they were not living in an extended-stay motel, they were living from family to family. The first sister stated that she had been coming to the Municipal

Ministry for several years. She stated that they were very helpful with food, clothing and bill vouchers. She had three children, two were grown and the youngest one, a male, was six years old. She explained the difficulty of living in poverty-not having enough food to eat, unable to pay bills especially the utilities. Her youngest had suffered academically in school but she had faith in the public school system in Prestige County because they provided many resources such as tutoring for her son, gifts during the holiday season, food, and clothing. She said that the schools were very caring and supportive.

The second sister admits to being a “free loader” off the system. She said, “It is out there for free and I am going to take all that I can.” Her rationale for living the way that she does was because she noticed other cultures, new to America, receiving assistance and opportunities quicker than African-American women. She said it was not fair.

She had a 14 year old daughter who was experiencing some academic difficulties and when she explained to the school that her daughter’s unsatisfactory grades were due to being homeless, the school immediately provided tutorial and other resources to assist with food and clothing. Both sisters agreed that the only thing they liked about county where they lived were the schools.

According to both sisters, the high cost of living and a fixed income caused them to be homeless. They, too, believed that there should exist a program that would place their family in extended-stay motels temporarily then move them into a more stable and safe environment that is conducive to living.

The tenth participant was a graduate student who lost her job about 18 months ago. After losing her job she could no longer pay the mortgage for it had gone into foreclosure. The only way out was to relinquish the house back to the bank in which she did; however, she now resides in an extended-stay motel paying more than she had when she was living in a house. She stated that she had sought out numerous support services, but failed to obtain assistance due to being employed. She said one had to be destitute in order to get assistance from the government.

She had three children: two grown daughters and a 13 year old son. Due to being homeless, her son experienced a lot of emotional turmoil for he could not relate to being homeless. They moved several times after the house foreclosed. It was then that she decided to send her son to her brother and father in Alabama. She stated:

He had never been homeless before. He had moved from school to school and lost all of his friends. The schools he attended in the subject county noticed his emotional problems and tried to assist using support from counselors; however, his behavior and attitude began to spiral. It was very hard for him. He is now back home and doing well. He is around my family and I am very fortunate to have good parents and a loving brother. He is around men at a time where he really needs to be.

Based on the interviews of the five individuals, all believed that due to their fixed income, the cost of living was unattainable. Placement in a shelter or some type of assessment center would alleviate constant mobility. All agreed that if support services

were accessible and case managers were assigned, as a guide to ending their homelessness situation, life would be better.

Findings from Representatives from School District, Local School, & United Way

The final three interviews were of representatives from Prestige School District, Cart Elementary School, and United Way. The common themes that surfaced from these interviews were lack of support services, affordable housing, poverty issues, childcare, and stability.

All three noted that homelessness was a growing phenomenon in the subject county for which this study pertained to. Homeless individuals were sleeping from relative to relative, friends to friends, family to family, and living in extended-stay motels for shelter. According to the representatives from United Way, children and their families were living in their cars and in large storage units.

The representative from Cart Elementary School said that poverty, immigrant, and minority populations were growing and so were all the issues that went along with it; and homelessness was a huge one. Homelessness within the Hispanic community was undocumented and many were shut out from resources which caused them to live with relatives or out on the streets. Homelessness among African-Americans was headed by single women.

Many Asian families view homelessness as a mark of shame according to the United Way representatives. There were Asian families who camped out in the woods in order to seek shelter for the night. They come to America without families and work at these mill places. If they were not living on the streets, they lived in small cramped

homes that housed 10-12 people. This type of homelessness was not known through out the community.

All three resoundingly agreed that there was a tremendous need for a shelter or an assessment center in the subject county for which this study pertained to; however, the county refused to accept the fact that there was indeed a need for the housing of women and children who were homeless. In line with the representative from Cart Elementary School, she said that the subject county had a problem with image and perception. She also stated that if you look at the demographics and statistics, the old subject county does not exist but no one wanted to admit it.

The following table displays the merging of common themes from all participants interviewed and the correlation between the factors associated with educating homeless children and the impact of quality education (see Table 3).

Table 3

Merging Themes, from All Interviews, Which were Associated with Support Services, Poverty, Stability, and Quality Education

Themes Associated With:			
Support Services	Poverty	Stability	Quality Education
1. Lack of resources	1. Affordable Housing	1. Absenteeism from School	1. Excellent Schools
2. Need for Case Managers	2. Lack of Food and Clothing	2. Numerous School Transfers	2. Academic Support

Table 3 (continued)

Themes Associated With:			
Support Services	Poverty	Stability	Quality Education
3. Ongoing Support Services	3. Affordable Child Care	3. Need for Shelter	3. Need for Before & After School Care
	4. Cause of Homelessness	4. Need for more Transitional Housing	
	5. Cost of Living		

The representative from Prestige School District stated that if you look at the personality of Prestige County, it had traditionally been sort of a “bedroom” community. Although this was not the case today but historically, it was more rural; however, it was now a matter of reality catching up with the politics. The support services in the subject county had not caught up with the needs. The representative pointed out the existence of the Domestic Violence Shelter and the Children Shelter in the subject county but honed in on the fact that a Women and Children Shelter was nonexistent in the county due to the fact that, “We don’t want that here.”

The findings included the need for more case managers. The United Way representatives said that there was a need for case managers because one can get homeless individuals to a shelter but unless services were found to help them, they were not going anywhere. The case managers that were working were on overload and found it difficult to meet the needs of the homeless. In many of the schools located in Prestige School District, there were only two district level social workers that worked with the homeless population for the entire county. Many of the social workers on a local level

had 30 schools they oversaw. Since the execution of this study, two social workers have been hired in Prestige School District. According to the representatives from the school district, local, school and United Way, affordable housing, transportation, and childcare assistance were needs children and their families required in order to receive a quality education.

How does Prestige County government ensure that these children are receiving a quality education? Based on the findings, stability is key to assuring less mobility. If parents are moving constantly, then so are their children. The increase in school transfers hinders a child from receiving a quality education that which is their right. All children have the right to learn despite their living conditions and their inability to stabilize that which they have no control over which is homelessness. Based on the interviews, a quality of education is present in the schools located in Prestige County, however, constant moving, poverty issues, lack of support services are the common barriers to receiving a quality education.

Conclusions

The findings of this study clearly identified many important implications homelessness had on Prestige County's community, school district, support services, elected officials, media, foundations, service organizations, local businesses and churches. The following were the conclusions, which were derived from the findings of this study and were presented as responses to the research questions and analysis of the data.

This study revealed that the participants at the Municipal Ministry were truly concerned about the welfare of their children but due to events beyond their control, the three basic needs, all living things required in order to survive, were taken away due to economic hardship. All participants sought out assistance from the Municipal Ministry for help with food, clothing, employment, and any financial assistance that which provided a sense of hope.

The focus group from the Municipal Ministry, believed no one cared about their homeless conditions. However, each was determined to obtain any resources they could because they all had children to provide for. All believed that if the basic necessities were granted, then the receipt a quality education for their children would be bestowed. Additionally, based on observations, the focus group appeared to have gained a sense of comradery or a sense of not being alone in the struggle to survive day to day. It was as if they had come to life after discovering similar experiences and situations—as if they discovered hope.

Moreover, the African-American participants, from the Municipal Ministry, were concerned that their race was a determinant in getting fair support and/or resources. Even though they believed that they were treated unjustly due to their race, they were determined to survive in a world that seemed, in their perspectives, to disregard their existence.

The entire participants from the Municipal Ministry, all agreed that support services, poverty, and stability had a strong connection to the quality of education received from the public schools. Many of the emotional problems, academic

difficulties, and unsatisfactory grades were due to the participants' homeless conditions. Although the schools provided some of the basic essentials to help cope with academics and social and emotional issues, the students continued to struggle and search for normalcy in their lives.

The study suggested that the representatives from Prestige School District, Cart Elementary School, and United Way were advocates for children and their families who were homeless. These representatives were willing to stand in the gap in order to bridge together support for those deemed homeless.

Furthermore, all agreed that if Prestige County had a shelter, that would alleviate families living on the streets, in the woods, in storage units, in cars or in extended-stay motels. Conditions in these places are dangerous to children because they provide a gateway for drug use and prostitution, and take away innocence that which they entered the world with. What homeless children need most of all is a home. While they are experiencing homelessness, however, children desperately need to remain in school. School is one of the few stable, secure places in the lives of homeless children and youth—a place where they can acquire the skills needed to help them escape poverty (Nation Coalition for the Homeless, 2007).

The participants from the Municipal Ministry seemed to be at a stand still on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (as cited in Huitt, 2004). The responses to the interview questions placed them no where on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model by the mere fact that unless the basic human needs of children and their families are met, they would be

incapable of making any progress in life much less any educational improvements (Appendix C).

The research findings revealed a relationship between support services, poverty, and stability and the quality of education. Furthermore, it was found that the basic needs have a strong correlation to receiving a quality education. Children can not focus on receiving a quality education if they are hungry, unkempt, and tired.

Implications

The findings and conclusions of this study contained the following significant implications relating to support services, poverty, stability, and quality education:

1. Information from this research served as a community focus for local school districts, businesses, community leaders, and local churches.
2. This study provided research data for school districts and the Department of Health and Social Services to use for revising policy relative to meeting the needs of the homeless.
3. Data collected were used to provide a deeper understanding about the daily struggles among homeless children and their families as it relates to quality education.
4. As this study makes clear, families who become homeless do not fit one general description. However, families experiencing homelessness do have certain shared basic needs, including affordable housing, adequate incomes, and health care. Some homeless families may need additional services such as mental health or drug treatment in order to remain securely housed. All of

these needs must be met to prevent and to end homelessness (National Coalition for the Homeless, 2007).

Recommendations

The analysis of the data collected from this study provides the basis for the following recommendations:

Recommendations for Administrative Practice

1. Additional research involving factors associated with educating homeless children and how they will impact the quality of education in a large metropolitan school district is needed, especially since there were no shelters in the subject county that served women and children. It is recommended that community leaders, business leaders, and the county at large recognize the homeless problem in the subject county as severe and growing exponentially. Until a shelter is built, the homeless population will continue to increase.
2. It is highly recommended that the county government build and design an assessment center/shelter for woman and children who would lead into providing more transitional housing programs for those who are destitute.
3. It is recommended that school districts require training for school personnel on how to deal with homeless children and their families.

Recommendations for Policy Changes

1. Homelessness is a growing phenomenon in Prestige County. It is recommended that the county government changes its policy on assisting the

homeless. Instead short-term assistance, the implementation of a comprehensive plan to eradicate a family's homeless status should be the focal point of the issue.

2. The county commissioners should change their policy and build a better transit system comparable to the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) so that transportation is easy and feasible for homeless families who are without any means of transportation.
3. Based on the McKinney-Vento Act it is recommended that school district collaborate with public preschool, such as Head Start in order to ensure that children under the age of five receive early childhood development skills.
4. Based on the McKinney-Vento Act, school districts should provide a comprehensive before- and after- school program with Parks and Recreation, through the 21st Century Grant, for children who are in a crisis situation.
5. This investigation showed how important support services were a key element to supporting homeless children and their families. It is recommended that government support services and a variety of agencies partner and collaborate with school district's support services in order to offer access to a broader array of services.
6. It is recommended that school programs find ways to accommodate their eligibility policies and procedures to address the needs of highly mobile students.

Recommendation for Future Research

1. Future studies should examine the connection between homelessness and gang affiliation for there is a strong correlation between the two.

Summary

The findings, which were based on the responses of one focus group and eight individual interviews to four research questions, revealed that there is a relationship between support services, poverty, and stability and the quality of education received by homeless children. If basic needs are not met, children would not focus on education but on how to survive. All participants from the Municipal Ministry felt degraded and ashamed of being homeless, yet they persevered towards hope during the time of great struggle and pain.

Ending family homelessness will require bolder, more innovative solutions than ever before. Children need policies that will promote stable housing and ensure access to a good education, prevention health care, and adequate nutrition. Parents need the tools – education, job training, child care, income supports, and affordable housing—that will lift them out of homelessness and provide greater stability and security for their children (Nunez, 2006).

The recommendations were created based on the findings and conclusions, which may benefit a large metropolitan school district. Community activists and school systems are encouraged to use this study as a plan to diminish homelessness.

APPENDIX A

Consent Letter/Form

Dear Families/Participants:

I am currently a graduate student at Clark Atlanta University pursuing my doctoral degree in educational leadership. The purpose of the study is to determine factors associated with educating homeless children and how they will impact the quality of education in a metropolitan school district.

Your help is needed to complete this study. Interviews collected in the study will be treated confidentially. Thus, your name will not be disclosed.

By signing this consent form, you are permitting me to use the data for the purpose of my study.

Thank you,

Alicia Yvette Jackson
Doctoral Student

(Signature)

(Date)

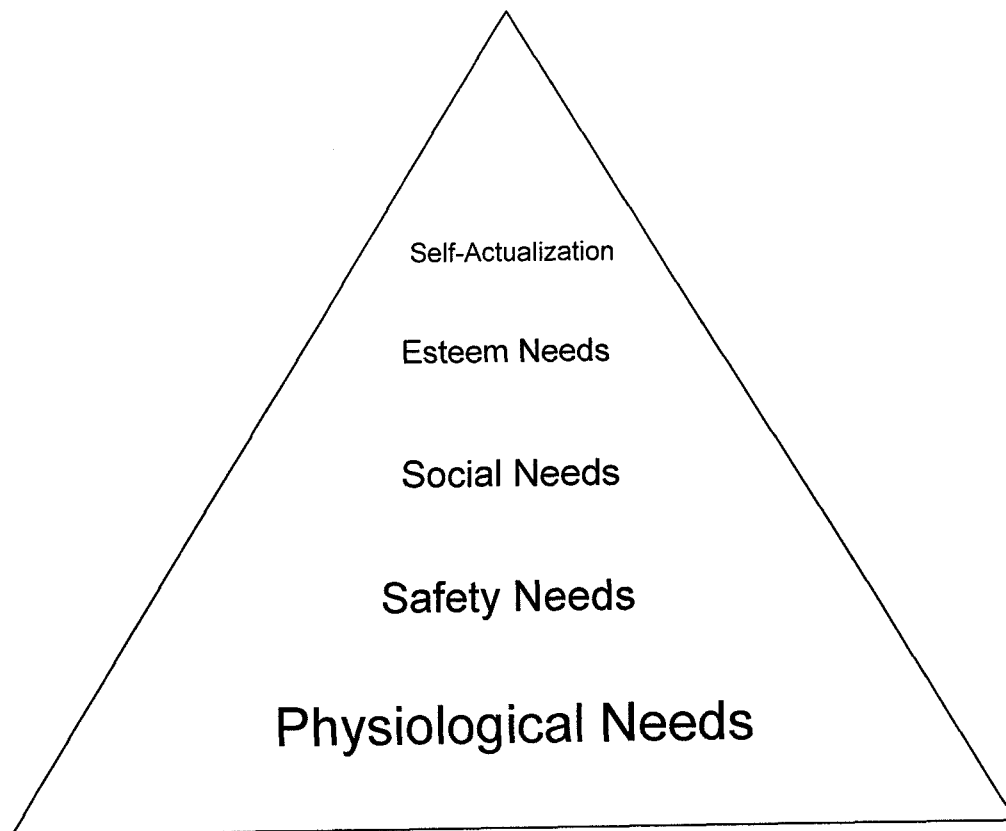
APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. What major event happened in your life that caused you to come to the Municipal Ministry, the pseudonym for the organization providing assistance to the homeless?
2. Do you feel like you are getting the help you need to better your situation?
3. If there were some type of shelter/housing extended to you, would that make your situation better?
4. How are your children performing in school? Do they attend public school in the county where you live?

APPENDIX C

Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs



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